



# **EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**



## **MINUTES of the EMPA plenary sitting of 17 March 2009 Brussels**

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## **1. Report by the President on the EMPA fact-finding mission to the Middle East**

The Assembly heard President Pöttering, President of the EMPA, reporting on the fact-finding mission to the Middle East (Cairo, Gaza, Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Amman) from 22 to 24 February 2009.

President Pöttering concluded his presentation by stressing that:

- the list of approved items to be brought into Gaza should be replaced by a restricted list of forbidden products;
- solutions must be found to resume the circulation of cash;
- an international presence should be at the various crossing points in order to secure the borders;
- both parties should be encouraged by the international community to conclude a permanent agreement based on the terms of reference and principles of the Madrid conference, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Roadmap and the agreements previously concluded.

## **2. Speeches of guest speakers**

The Assembly heard **Mr. Karel Schwarzenberg**, President-in-office of the Council who stressed the importance the Presidency attaches to a strong parliamentary dimension of the Union for the Mediterranean. The EMPA activity can only enrich the Euro Med partnership and reinforce its democratic legitimacy.

Regarding the situation in Gaza, Mr. Schwarzenberg congratulated the Assembly for having sent a Fact Finding Mission to the Middle East, as a concrete sign of the partnership engagement in the Middle East. After recalling the outcomes of the Conference of Sharm El-Sheik, he stated that unconditional and sustained opening of Israel's crossings with Gaza is indispensable, stressing that the EU is ready to reactivate its Border Assistance Mission in Rafah as soon as conditions allow, and to examine the possibility of extending its assistance to other crossing points as part of the overall EU commitment in the region.

Mr. Schwarzenberg expressed the hope and expectation that the next Israeli government will commit itself to the process of peace talks and, in particular, tackle the issue of settlements.

As regards, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Presidency in-office of the Council expressed the view that it was paramount that it remained on the table, as it is not only a peace proposal but also sets out the prospect of good neighbourliness in the relations between Arab countries and Israel.

**Mr. Javier Solana**, High Representative of the European Union for Common Foreign and Security Policy, recalled that he had had the opportunity to chair the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of 1995 establishing the Barcelona Process, and underlined the significance of the partnership and the need of increased efforts in taking one step further the solidarity and cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Regarding EMPA, the High Representative stressed that parliamentarians represent the citizens of the Union for the Mediterranean and underlined the importance of not losing track of

identities, history and culture, as important elements for a lasting peace, especially in this challenged region.

He referred to the crises in the Middle East, focusing on the connection peace - security and estimated that in 2009, despite the difficulties, steps for comprehensive peace might be possible. Concerning Gaza, the attention was drawn to the frustration and loss of confidence of the Palestinian population, and as a result the killings and massive destructions might lead to further violence. The efforts of Egypt towards the reconciliation of Palestinian factions were praised, as well as regards the Conference of Sharm El-Sheik. The need for reconciliation within the Arab League was also underlined, as well as the hope that such a message will be given by the Doha Summit of 30 March 2009.

Regarding the new Israeli government, the importance to remain committed to the two states solution was underlined, as well as the need to put a stop to the settlements, as a necessary condition for a viable Palestinian state.

**Ms Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, Commissioner for External Relations, expressed her thanks to the President of the European Parliament for having the courage to organise the EMPA plenary soon after the crisis in Gaza, while many meetings (ministerial and others) have been put on hold, and stressed that this is what should be done, as dialogue is the only means for positive evolution. She underlined the important role of parliamentarians, as representatives of the citizens in the region, inclusively in the efforts to bring about peace.

The Commission put a lot of efforts into developing the Barcelona Process and will continue with the Union for the Mediterranean, which has as its basis the entire acquis of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

The Commissioner expressed the view that the cooperation process which started in 1995 brought around significant evolutions, with regard to economic reforms, governance, etc. but that change in society is still needed. As regards the big projects foreseen by the Union for the Mediterranean, she underlined their great importance for the benefit of the population in the region, but stressed also that they cannot be realised in a political vacuum.

On the situation in the Middle East, the Commissioner underlined the importance of reconciliation between the Palestinian factions and stressed the need that the new Israeli government gives clear signals of its determination for peace.

### **3. Debate on the Situation in the Middle East**

The following Members participated in the debate:

Dr. Sorour, Egypt - Mr. Vella, Malta - Mr. Tabarki, Tunisia - Mr. Bonsignore, EP (EPP-ED group) - Mr. Chegaf, Morocco - Mr. Hadjinicolas, Cyprus - Mr. Quba'a, Palestine - Ms Napoletano, EP (PES group) - Mr. El Enein, Egypt - Ms Papadimitriou, Greece - Mr. Boulehya, Tunisia - General Morillon, EP (ALDE group) - Mr. Rezgui, Algeria - Mr. Antunes, Portugal - Ms Chaoachi, Tunisia - Mr. Masiel, EP (UEN group) - Mr. Whbee, Israel - Mr. Costa, Italy - Mr. Moreno, EESC (Observer) - Mr. Hammerstein, EP (G/EFA group) - Ms Chellouche, Algeria - Mr. Sander, Sweden - Mr. Bitalji, Jordan - Ms Morgantini, EP (EUL/NL group) - Mr.

Sanduka, Palestine - Mr Pedret, Spain - Dr. Sorour, Egypt - Mr. Bonsignore, EP (EPP-ED group) - Mr. Abaza, Egypt - Mr. Juri, Slovenia - Mr. Al-Sawair, Jordan - Mr. Carnero, EP (PES group) - Mr. Andriukaitis, Lithuania - Mr. Al Khaleefah, Jordan - Ms Patrie, EP (PES group), Mr. Obiols, EP (PES group), Mr. Tatarella, EP (UEN group)

Most interventions focussed on the necessity to address the dramatic humanitarian situation in Gaza, to hold the international community and Israel accountable for breaches of international humanitarian law and on the continuation of settlements activity. Calls were addressed to the parties involved to honour their undertakings. A strong support for the Arab Peace Initiative was also expressed.

#### **4. Endorsement of the membership of Albania, Mauritania and the Principality of Monaco**

The Vice Chair of the Political Committee and Member of the Working group on Financing the Assembly and Revision of the EMPA's Rules of procedure, Mr Robert del Picchia, presented, on behalf of the enlarged Bureau which had met earlier in the morning, a temporary compromise solution regarding the composition of the two components of the Assembly.

##### Decision:

On a provisional basis, the Assembly agreed to increase the number of EMPA members to 280, allocating 10 seats to the Mauritanian delegation, and two seats for each delegation from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Monaco and Montenegro. The Assembly then endorsed the membership of Albania, Mauritania and the Principality of Monaco.

Ms Jozefina Topalli, Speaker of the Albanian Parliament took the floor.

#### **5. Presentation by the Chairs of the Parliamentary Committees of the Draft Recommendations**

Mr. Robert del Picchia, presented the recommendation of the Committee on Political Affairs, Security and human rights.

The President of the EMPA proposed to adopt the recommendation paragraph by paragraph.

Mr. Carnero (EP, PES group) suggested adopting the recommendation by consensus. The Algerian and Egyptian delegations expressed reserves.

The President put the recommendation to the vote paragraph by paragraph.

On paragraph one, the Algerian, Palestinian, Israeli and French delegations took the floor. The paragraph was adopted with the replacement of "*condemns equally strongly*" with "*also condemns*". The Israeli Member voted against.

On paragraph four, the Algerian, EP, Jordanian and Egyptian delegations took the floor. The paragraph was adopted as such but a new paragraph "*Considers that there should be an independent inquiry into the alleged violations of international humanitarian law, including the use of banned arms in civilian areas*" was inserted in the text. The Israeli Member voted against.

On paragraph five, the Palestinian, Israeli and French delegations took the floor. This paragraph was adopted with the insertion of a call to Israel "*to accept its responsibilities and make its contribution to the reconstruction of Gaza*". The Israeli Member voted against.

On paragraph six, the Palestinian, Israeli, EP, Egyptian and French delegations took the floor. An exchange of views was held on a multinational presence in order to secure the borders. A compromise solution to remove the segment of phrase at stake (ie "*including by combating the trafficking in arms and munitions to the Gaza Strip*") and to add a new paragraph "*Urges the European Union to abide by the terms of its Code Of Conduct on Arms Exports and national parliaments of Member States of the Union for the Mediterranean to exercise their prerogative to scrutinize the conduct of their governments as regards arms exports, in particular those intended for States engaged in conflicts and members of the Union for the Mediterranean*" was rejected.

On paragraph 8, the Jordanian delegation suggested to modify the text by replacing "*to resume the political process*" by "*to resume serious negotiations*". The paragraph was adopted, the Israeli Member voting against.

On paragraph 11, the Jordanian delegation took the floor to propose to add a reference on the excavations in Jerusalem. The Chair suggested referring the matter to the Culture Committee.

On paragraph 12, the Israeli and Algerian delegations took the floor. For the Israeli Member a reference to the necessity for Corporal Shalit to be visited by the Red Cross should be added to the text. The Algerian Member suggested modifying the wording of the paragraph by introducing the notion of "*political prisoners*". The Assembly voted in favour of the Algerian oral amendment. The Israeli Member voted against.

On paragraph 16, the Lithuanian delegation took the floor to propose to insert the notion of xenophobia. The Chamber decided to add "Islamophobia" instead.

Decisions: The recommendation of the Committee on Political Affairs, Security and human rights as amended by the plenary was adopted. Paragraph six of the draft recommendation on the presence of a multinational force in Gaza to secure borders was referred back to the Political Committee for further discussion.

Ms Afifa Salah presented the recommendation of the Committee on women and immigration and women and science.

Mr. Georgios Salagoudis presented the recommendation of the *ad hoc* Committee on Energy and Environment.

Decisions: The recommendations of the Committee on women and immigration and women and science and of the *ad hoc* Committee on Energy and Environment were adopted by consensus.

## **6. Conclusions of the Presidency**

The Assembly heard a statement of President Pöttering, *out-going* President of the EMPA for the conclusions of the Presidency. President Pöttering recalling the shared history of the Mediterranean region, as a source of unity, but also of the wounds yet to be healed.

President Pöttering stated that politicians' responsibility, however, is to build bridges, to maintain dialogue and together to devise proposals to be implemented by governments.

After a year as President of the EMPA: presiding over the proceedings of a multilateral parliamentary assembly such as the EMPA is rather like being the conductor of a large philharmonic orchestra. The President's task is to combine diversity, to pull together the full range of views and standpoints, with the ultimate aim of establishing a common position, what might be termed 'Euro-Mediterranean sound'.

Then, the Assembly heard a closing statement by Mr. Majali, *in-coming* President of EMPA and Speaker of the Jordanian Parliament. President Majali paid tribute to Mr. Pöttering, who during his two years as a Bureau member has played a visible, active and engaged role.

After recalling that 2009 has been proclaimed by the United Nations as the International Year of Reconciliation, the in-coming EMPA President encouraged Members to promote any initiative relating to this international year and to any idea that would further strengthen our Assembly's role, and increase its visibility and presence.

The Fifth EMPA Plenary session ended at 13h50.

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